

Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Session 1 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Putnam, Psalms, Session 1 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Fred Putnam's lecture on the Book of Psalms explores the Psalter's structure, authorship, and use in ancient Israel. He highlights the **book's five-part organization**, noting patterns in authorship attribution and the shift from petitionary to praise Psalms. Putnam emphasizes the **importance of considering the Psalms' context** within the larger book, rather than reading them in isolation. He also discusses the various interpretations surrounding the Psalms' function in worship, suggesting that they were likely used as hymns and chants. Finally, he proposes that engaging with the Psalms as a cohesive work fosters deeper theological understanding and shapes one's thinking about God.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Putnam, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Psalms).**



**Putnam_Pss_Session
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3. Briefing Document: Putnam, Psalms, Session 1 of 4

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture on the Book of Psalms:

Briefing Document: Dr. Fred Putnam's Lecture on the Book of Psalms

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Fred Putnam's lecture on the Book of Psalms. The lecture focuses on understanding the Psalter not merely as a collection of individual poems, but as a deliberately arranged book with its own internal logic, history, and purpose. Putnam emphasizes the need to consider the context and arrangement of the Psalms to fully grasp their meaning and impact.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. Titles & Names of the Book:

- **Psalms/Psalter:** Derived from the Greek "Psalterion," meaning poems sung to the music of a small harp.
- **Tehillim (Hebrew):** Means "praises," reflecting the Rabbinic perspective on the book's purpose.
- The book consists of approximately 150 poems written over several centuries.
- Different numbering systems exist (e.g., Protestant vs. Catholic Bibles) which can lead to confusion when consulting commentaries. "So, it's important to know when you're looking at a commentary or if you're surfing the web, to know if somebody's talking about the Vulgate... the psalm numbers might be different."
- Titles (e.g., "A Psalm of David") are often verse one in the Hebrew text, causing a one-off difference in verse numbering.

1. Types of Psalms:

- **Prayers (Addressed to God):** Approximately 90 out of 150 psalms are prayers to God, often petitioning for help.
- **Reflections/Meditations/Exhortations (About God):** The remaining 60 are not direct prayers but reflections on God, calls to praise, or meditations on specific themes.

- **Happy/Praise Psalms:** Examples include Psalms 29, 93, 96, 98, 100. These are Psalms of worship and adoration.
- **Sad/Petitionary Psalms:** Examples include Psalm 10. These psalms express the Psalmist's trouble and ask for God's intervention.
- **Reflective/Instructional Psalms:** Examples include Psalms 1, 2, 19, 119, 121. These psalms explore ideas and relationships (e.g. righteous vs. wicked).

1. The Psalter as an Arranged Book:

- The Psalter is divided into five books: (1-41), (42-72), (73-89), (90-106), and (107-150).
- These divisions are old, referenced by rabbis before the time of Christ.
- The divisions are not haphazard but reflect an intentional arrangement.
- **Book 1:** Predominantly Psalms ascribed to David. "In book one out of 41 Psalms, 38 of them, the title says, are ascribed to David."
- **Books 2 & 3:** Feature Psalms attributed to the "sons of Korah" and "Asaph".
- The term "ascribed to" (e.g., "A Psalm of David") might indicate authorship, style, dedication, or authorization. The Hebrew preposition used is versatile. "The preposition that's used there in Hebrew... can be used in many, many different ways."
- The phrase, "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended" at the end of Psalm 72 is a significant indicator of early collection. "At the end of Psalm 72, verse 20, it says, the prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended, which seems to indicate that they thought they'd gotten them all."
- Manuscript evidence shows variations in arrangement, particularly later in the Psalter, suggesting a gradual process of collection. "Generally speaking, the earlier in the Psalter the manuscripts are, that is, Psalms 1 through say 72...the more consistent their arrangement is. As we get later in the Psalter, the arrangements are different."
- The number of "orphan" Psalms (without titles) increases towards the end of the Psalter, with only three in book one, and 42 in books four and five.

1. Thematic Movement in the Psalter:

- The Psalter transitions from petitionary prayers (asking for God's help) in the first three books to more praise and adoration in the last two. "In the first three books, the majority of the Psalms, over 50 of them, are these petition prayers...But in the last two books... two-thirds of the Psalms, are happy ones. Psalms of praise and worship or confidence and adoration."
- This movement from desperation to confidence is also reflected within individual Psalms. "So that there's a movement in the Psalter as a whole from prayers, asking the Lord to save the poet to Psalms of praise for God's works of creation and of salvation or redemption or victory."
- This movement suggests the overall narrative/shape of the book is redemptive.

1. **Use of the Psalter in Ancient Israel:**

- The Psalter was likely used in worship contexts, but the specifics of its use are not entirely clear.
- Biblical accounts depict people singing/chanting in the Temple, but the precise nature of their music is unknown (likely not modern melodies). "It's almost certain that it did not sound like Mozart. It may have sounded much more like a Gregorian chant, or it may not have sounded like anything like that at all."
- 1 Chronicles 16 provides an example of how the Psalms were used, specifically employing a "pastiche" of Psalms 105, 96, 106, and 72. This is the only explicit example in the Bible.
- Traditional classifications of Psalms (e.g., penitential Psalms) are not clearly supported by evidence. "People identify them and say these are the penitential Psalms, but nobody even knows who first said that about them."
- Terms like "songs of ascent" (Psalms 120-134) are interesting, but there are various theories for what they might mean.

1. **Arrangement & Meaning:**

- The Psalter is arranged by author, title, and even by the name used for God (Yahweh vs. Elohim).
- The placement of Hallelujah Psalms shows deliberate grouping.
- The arrangement suggests that each Psalm should be understood in relation to its context (those before and after). "It would be much more helpful for us to read a

particular Psalm. And then as we're thinking about that, to read the Psalm that comes before it and to read the Psalm that comes after it."

- The order of psalms is intentional, as a poet would arrange a book of poems for a reason, not haphazardly.

1. **Implications for Reading the Psalter:**

- Readers should avoid treating the Psalms as isolated units but as part of a larger whole.
- It is important to note the movement from lament to praise within the book.
- Poetry, including the Psalms, is meant to engage our minds, present a new way of viewing reality and shape the way we think. "poetry is not meant to be read quickly. It's meant to entangle our minds with pictures and ideas, to give us a different way of looking at some aspect of reality, and to affect our thoughts."
- The Psalms show us different ways of relating to God: through prayer and through reflection.
- The Psalter itself conveys the idea that the "shape of things" is ultimately redemptive.

Conclusion:

Dr. Putnam's lecture emphasizes the importance of understanding the Book of Psalms as a carefully crafted book with its own structure, thematic development, and purpose. He urges listeners to move beyond simply reading the Psalms as isolated prayers or poems, and to consider how each one contributes to the larger message of the entire collection. By doing so, we can gain a much richer understanding of the ancient Israelite faith and the diverse ways of relating to God. This, according to Putnam, helps us to not just grasp the *content* of the psalms, but to have our thinking *shaped* by them.

4. Study Guide: Putnam, Psalms, Session 1 of 4

Psalms Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What are the two primary titles of the Book of Psalms, and what do they mean?
2. Why is it important to be aware of which version of the Psalms (e.g., Hebrew, Greek, Latin) someone is referencing?
3. Roughly, what percentage of the Psalms are prayers directly addressed to God? What is the nature of the other Psalms?
4. Describe the three general types of Psalms as presented in the lecture.
5. How is the Psalter traditionally divided, and are these divisions haphazard?
6. Explain the significance of the phrase "a Psalm of David" and its implications for authorship.
7. What evidence is there that the Psalter was compiled over time?
8. What does the distribution of Psalms ascribed to David across the five books of the Psalter suggest?
9. How does the focus of the Psalms shift as you move from the beginning to the end of the Psalter?
10. What is significant about 1 Chronicles 16 in relation to how the Psalms were used?

Answer Key

1. The two primary titles are *Psalms* (or *Psalter*) from the Greek word *psalterion* meaning poems sung to music, and *Tehillim* from the Hebrew meaning praises. These titles reflect the dual nature of the collection, both as musical poems and expressions of worship.
2. Different versions of the Psalms divide and number the poems differently (e.g., the Vulgate vs. Protestant Bibles). This difference can lead to confusion when comparing references in commentaries or other resources.

3. Approximately 60% of the Psalms are prayers addressed to God. The other 40% are reflections, meditations, or exhortations about God, but they are not directly addressed to him as a prayer.
4. The three types are: Psalms of worship and praise (happy Psalms), Psalms of lament or petition (sad Psalms), and reflective/meditative Psalms that explore ideas and teach, but are not direct prayers.
5. The Psalter is traditionally divided into five books. These divisions are not haphazard, but are structured around themes, authorship, and a purposeful flow.
6. The phrase "a Psalm of David" does not necessarily mean that David was the author in the way that we understand authorship today. It could also mean written in the style of, dedicated to, or authorized by David.
7. The ending of Psalm 72:20, "the prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended," suggests that there was a point where that collection of Psalms was thought to be complete, and later additional Psalms ascribed to David were added. The variable order of the Dead Sea Scrolls also supports a gradual compilation.
8. The fact that the majority of Psalms ascribed to David are found in the first two books of the Psalter suggests that these books formed an early collection of Davidic Psalms. Later books include fewer Psalms ascribed to him, indicating a piecemeal collection.
9. The focus of the Psalter shifts from the beginning, which is mainly petitions to God for help, to the end, which is dominated by praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. This shows a progression from desperation to confidence.
10. 1 Chronicles 16 is significant because it is the only specific passage in the Bible that shows how the Psalms were used in worship. It combines portions of Psalms 105, 96, 106, and 72, demonstrating that the Psalms were used as hymns of celebration, though exactly how they were performed cannot be known.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the importance of considering the Book of Psalms as a whole rather than just a collection of individual poems. How does this approach change the way we interpret and understand the Psalms?
2. Analyze the different kinds of Psalms mentioned in the lecture (happy, sad, reflective). How do these types contribute to the overall purpose and message of the Psalter? Give specific examples.
3. Describe the evidence that suggests the Psalter was arranged intentionally. How does the structure of the five books, the attribution of authorship, and the distribution of themes contribute to the purpose of the Psalter?
4. Explore the different ways the Psalter might have been used in ancient Israel. Given the limited evidence, how can we approach the various suggestions about the Psalter's function without making definitive conclusions?
5. How does the movement from lament to praise, which is found in both individual Psalms and the Psalter as a whole, reflect a larger theological understanding of God's relationship with his people?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Psalter:** Another name for the Book of Psalms, derived from the Greek word *psalterion*.
- **Tehillim:** The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms, meaning "praises."
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, including the Book of Psalms.
- **Vulgate:** The Latin translation of the Bible, including the Psalms.
- **A Psalm of David:** A phrase used in the titles of many Psalms, traditionally thought to mean written by David, but could also indicate style, dedication, or authorization.
- **Sons of Korah:** A family of Levites who served as temple musicians and to whom some Psalms are attributed.
- **Asaph:** Another Levitical musician and to whom some Psalms are attributed.
- **Orphan Psalms:** Psalms that do not have an author listed in their title.
- **Petition Prayers:** Psalms that are prayers asking for God's help, also referred to as lament or "sad" Psalms.
- **Hallelujah Psalms:** Psalms that include the word "hallelujah," typically associated with praise and worship.
- **Pilgrim Psalms/Songs of Ascents:** A collection of Psalms (120-134) thought to be sung or chanted by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Old Testament, often translated as "the Lord" (LORD in small caps).
- **Elohim:** The general Hebrew word for God.
- **Chant:** A more repetitive, stylized style of singing than might be assumed from the common translations of singing in the Bible.

5. FAQs on Putnam, Psalms, Session 1 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Psalms

1. What are the different names for the Book of Psalms, and what do they mean?

The Book of Psalms is known by several names. In Greek, it's called "Psalter" (or "Psalterion"), which refers to poems sung to the music of a psalter, a small harp-like instrument. The Hebrew name is "Tehillim," meaning "praises." These names highlight the dual nature of the Psalms as both musical poetry and expressions of worship and adoration. It is also important to note that the numbering of verses often differs between the Hebrew and English translations and between different versions like the Greek Septuagint or Latin Vulgate, requiring caution when cross-referencing.

2. What are the main categories of Psalms and how are they distributed within the book?

The Psalms can be broadly categorized into three types. Firstly, there are Psalms of worship and praise, expressing joy and adoration towards God (about a third of the Psalter). Secondly, there are Psalms of lament or petition, where the Psalmist is in distress, crying out to God for help (about another third). Lastly, there are reflective or meditative Psalms that ponder theological themes, moral issues, and the nature of God's relationship with humanity (making up the rest of the Psalter). The Psalter as a whole moves from an emphasis on petition in the earlier books to one of praise and confidence in the later books.

3. How is the Psalter organized, and why is this significant?

The Psalter is traditionally divided into five books: Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. These divisions are not arbitrary and date back to at least the time of Christ. The first two books are dominated by Psalms ascribed to David, while subsequent books feature Psalms by the sons of Korah, Asaph, and many anonymous Psalms. This arrangement suggests that the Psalter was intentionally curated and not simply a random collection of poems. This ordering reveals a narrative arc from distress and lament to praise and thanksgiving, implying an intentional process of arrangement over time.

4. **What does "a Psalm of David" mean, and how does it impact our understanding of authorship?** The phrase "a Psalm of David" (or similar phrases with other names) is a common title found in the Psalms. The Hebrew preposition translated as "of" can mean several things, including "by," "for," or "dedicated to." Thus, it's not certain if it always signifies that David (or another person) was the actual author. Instead, it might indicate that the Psalm is in the style of David, dedicated to him, or commissioned or authorized by him. This ambiguity helps reveal that while the Psalms are attributed to individuals, they likely underwent a process of editing, compilation, and arrangement over many generations.
5. **Was the Psalter used as a prayer or hymn book in ancient Israel, and how can we know that?** While the Psalms are often referred to as the prayer and hymn book of ancient Israel, evidence is limited, and we cannot know for certain how they were used in temple worship. 1 Chronicles 16 describes a service where David assigned Asaph and his relatives to sing a medley of verses from Psalms 105, 96, and 106, but this is the only concrete scriptural example of Psalm use. Other uses like "penitential psalms" or "songs of ascents" are speculative and based on later traditions.
6. **What are some key aspects of the Psalter's structure that demonstrate it is a purposefully organized book?** The Psalter is structured to suggest an intentional design rather than a random collection. This organization is seen in several ways, including by author (e.g., a concentration of Davidic Psalms in the earlier books), by type (e.g., movement from petition to praise), by the name used for God (Yahweh in the first part, Elohim in the second, and another Yahweh section), and by thematic grouping (e.g. the Hallelujah Psalms). Furthermore, some Psalms are linked to create larger thematic blocks which calls readers to consider the relationship between each Psalm and those surrounding it.
7. **Why is it important to consider the Psalter as a book, rather than just a collection of individual poems?** Understanding the Psalter as a purposefully arranged book, rather than 150 independent poems, allows us to appreciate the overarching message and flow of the text. The placement of each psalm is meaningful, influencing how we interpret it. Just as a poet arranges poems for a purpose, the compilers of the Psalter did so to guide the reader through a narrative arc and a reflection on God's relationship with humanity. In other words, individual psalms are enriched when read in the context of the broader book.

8. **What is the broader significance of reading the Psalms, and how should it shape our thinking?** Reading the Psalms teaches us both how to pray and how to think about our relationship with God. The Psalms provide models for both addressing God directly in prayer and also reflecting on his nature, actions, and word. They offer a wide range of emotions and experiences and emphasize that our relationship with God involves both direct engagement and mindful contemplation. Furthermore, the Psalter's overall shape—moving from lament to praise—reminds us that the trajectory of faith and life is redemptive, that even in distress, God is moving things towards a place of hope. This encourages us to see our own individual and collective stories within the framework of God's redemptive plan. Ultimately the Psalms mold our thinking in a way that makes us consider the "how" of our theological claims, rather than only the "what".